



Cathedral Cove

A step-by-step painting guide by Richard Robinson

Watch the full lesson at <https://mypaintingclub.com/lessons/207-Cathedral-Cove>

MY PAINTING CLUB

Introduction

In this chapter, I invite you to join me on a journey to Cathedral Cove, a stunning natural wonder that offers a perfect blend of challenge and inspiration for any painter. We'll focus on loosening up our painting techniques, a task that's often easier said than done. Together, we'll explore the five keys to achieving a fresh, painterly look without losing the essence of realism. This lesson is designed to be interactive and engaging, as it includes a pre-recorded livestream with student questions and answers. You'll have the opportunity to paint along with me, stroke by stroke, and you can pause and replay the session as needed. We'll delve into creating expressive and abstract brush strokes using acrylics, testing just how gestural and painterly we can get. As we transition from smaller to larger canvases, we'll adjust our brush sizes and paint quantities to maintain that expressive quality. So, grab your favorite beverage and a cookie, and let's enjoy the experience of a live workshop together!



Cathedral Cove 15x15" Acrylic on Canvas



REFERENCE PHOTO 1

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 2

The scene as Richard found it.



REFERENCE PHOTO 3

The scene as Richard found it.

Materials

Gather these materials before you start. If you don't have the exact same supplies, use what you have and substitute freely.

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

- Atelier Interactive Acrylics
- Phthalo Blue
- Ultramarine Blue
- Bordeaux / Alizarine Crimson
- Naphthol Red Light / Cadmium Red Light
- Yellow Ochre
- Arylamide Yellow Light / Cadmium Yellow Light
- Titanium White
- Canvas
- Fredrix ultrasmooth canvas (Giving it a light sanding first helps the paint stick better).
- You could use a canvas panel or anything you prefer.
- Brushes
- [Rosemary & Co. Richard Robinson Brush Set](#)
- Palette knife
- Paper towels
- Stay-wet palette
- Water spray bottle

1 Gestural Painting and Canvas Size



Experiment with Gestural Painting

Explore creating expressive and abstract brush strokes. Use acrylics to test how gestural and painterly you can get with your technique.

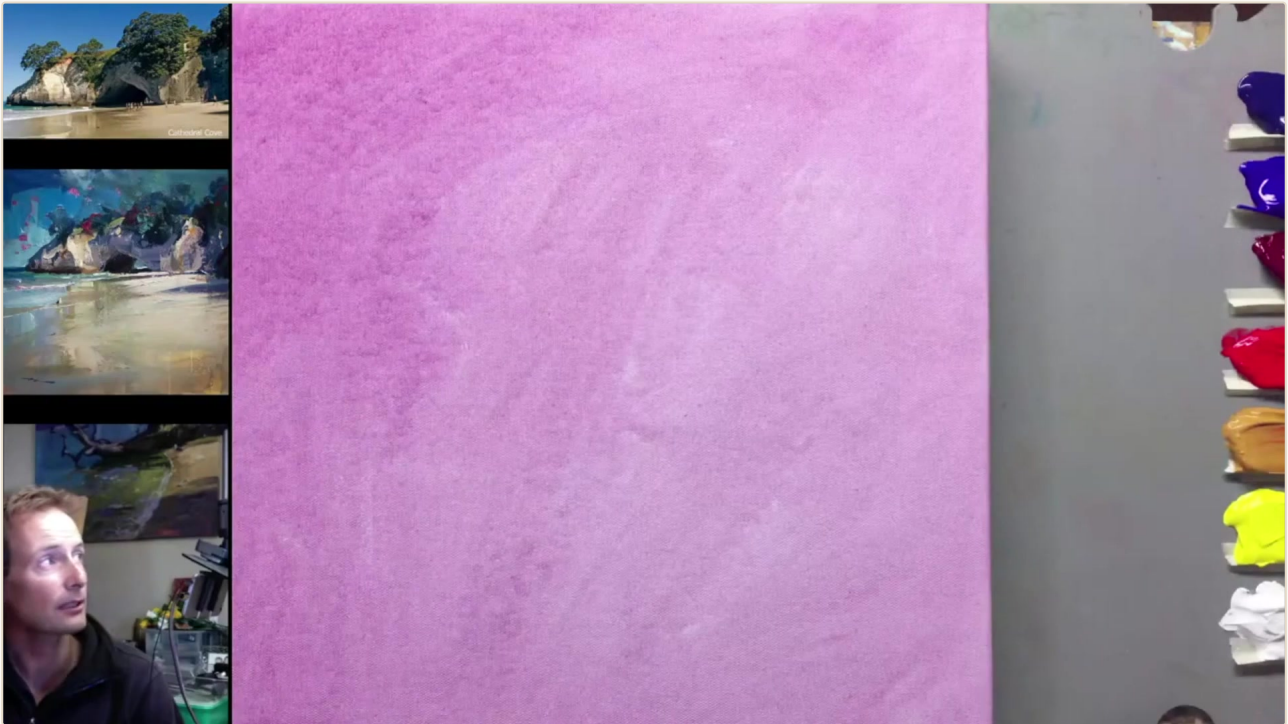
Upsize Your Canvas and Tools

When moving from a small to a larger canvas, increase the size of your brushes and the amount of paint you use. Adjust the size of your brush strokes to maintain the gestural and expressive quality of your work.

PRO TIP

Upsize your brushes and paint quantity when working on larger canvases to maintain expressiveness.

2 Brushes and Tools



Apply Magenta Undertone

Use a big brush and dip it into magenta paint mixed with lots of water. Apply a thin layer over the stretched canvas. This undertone will create a nice shimmer against the blues and greens in your painting.

Let the Undertone Dry

Allow the magenta wash to dry completely. Depending on the heat and environment, this should take about 20 to 30 minutes. Ensure it's just thick enough to show some color.

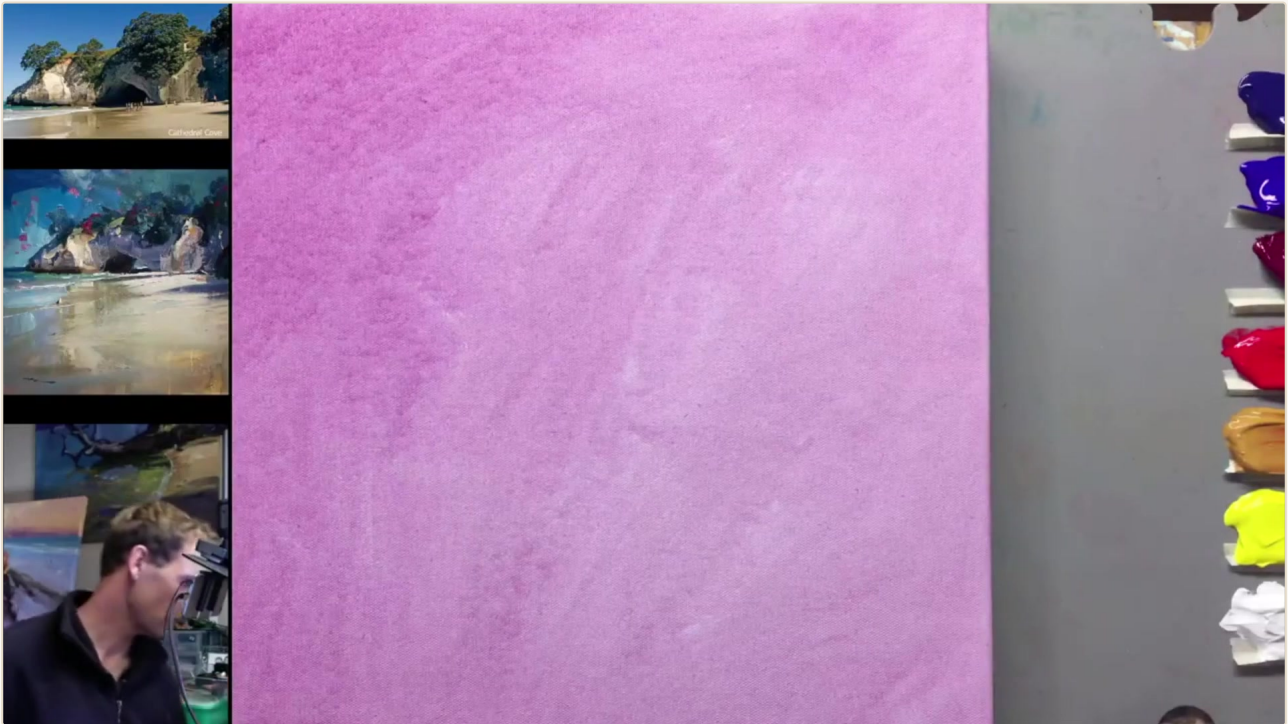
Select Brushes

Choose big flat brushes for your painting. Use a mix of synthetic and bristle brushes for different textures and effects.

PRO TIP

Use a thin magenta wash as an undertone to enhance the shimmer of blues and greens in your painting.

3 Sketching the Composition



Sketch the Big Shapes

Begin by sketching the big shapes of the scene. Focus on capturing the overall composition without getting bogged down in details.

Observe the Beach Slope

Pay attention to the line at the base of the rocks. Ensure it has a slight curve or angle to reflect the slope of the beach, which adds important information about the beach's shape.

Add Ocean and Waves

Sketch the ocean coming in with some waves. This will help establish the movement and flow of the water in your composition.

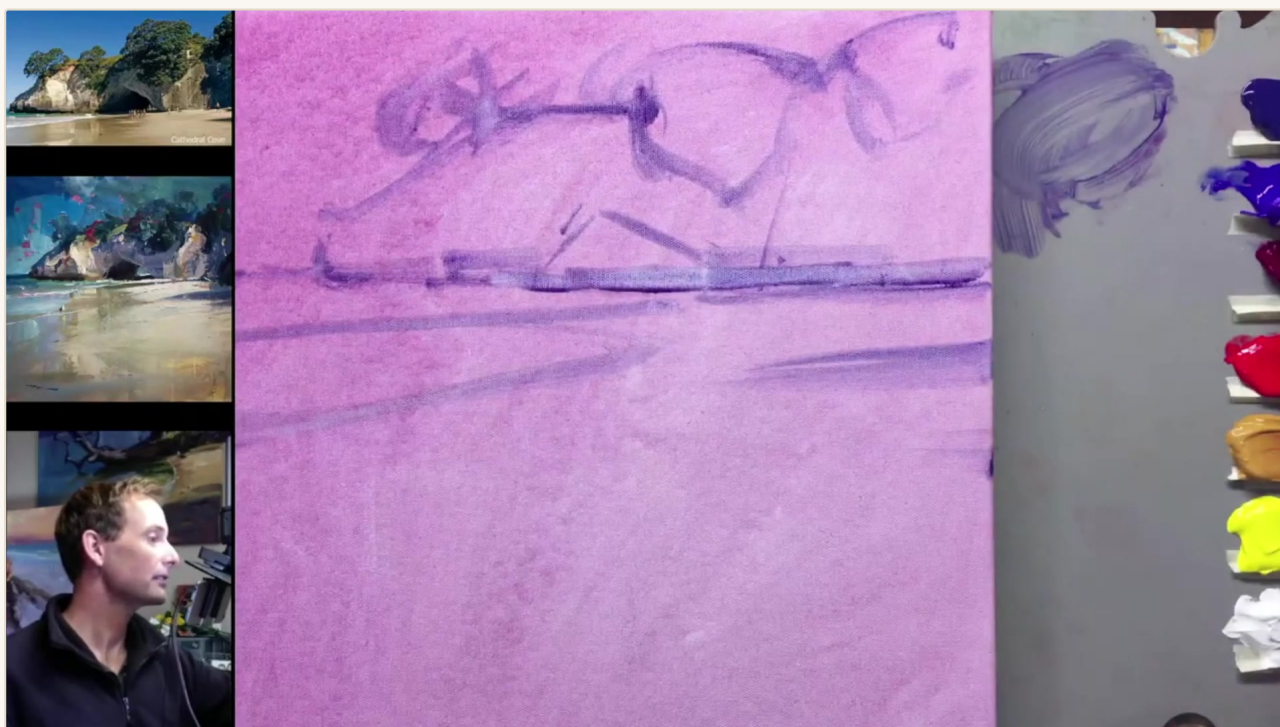
Include Shadows and Archway

Add shadows cast by trees to give depth to the scene. Finally, sketch in the archway, as it is a significant feature of the composition.

PRO TIP

Ensure the line at the base of the rocks has a slight curve to accurately depict the beach's slope.

4 Blocking in the Darks



Prepare Your Paints

Mix ultramarine blue, alizarin crimson, and a little yellow ochre to create a dark, rich color. This will be used to block in the darkest areas of your painting.

Use a Spray Bottle

Lightly spray your palette with water using a spray bottle. This helps keep the acrylic paints moist and workable. Ensure the bottle is filled with water, not cleaning products.

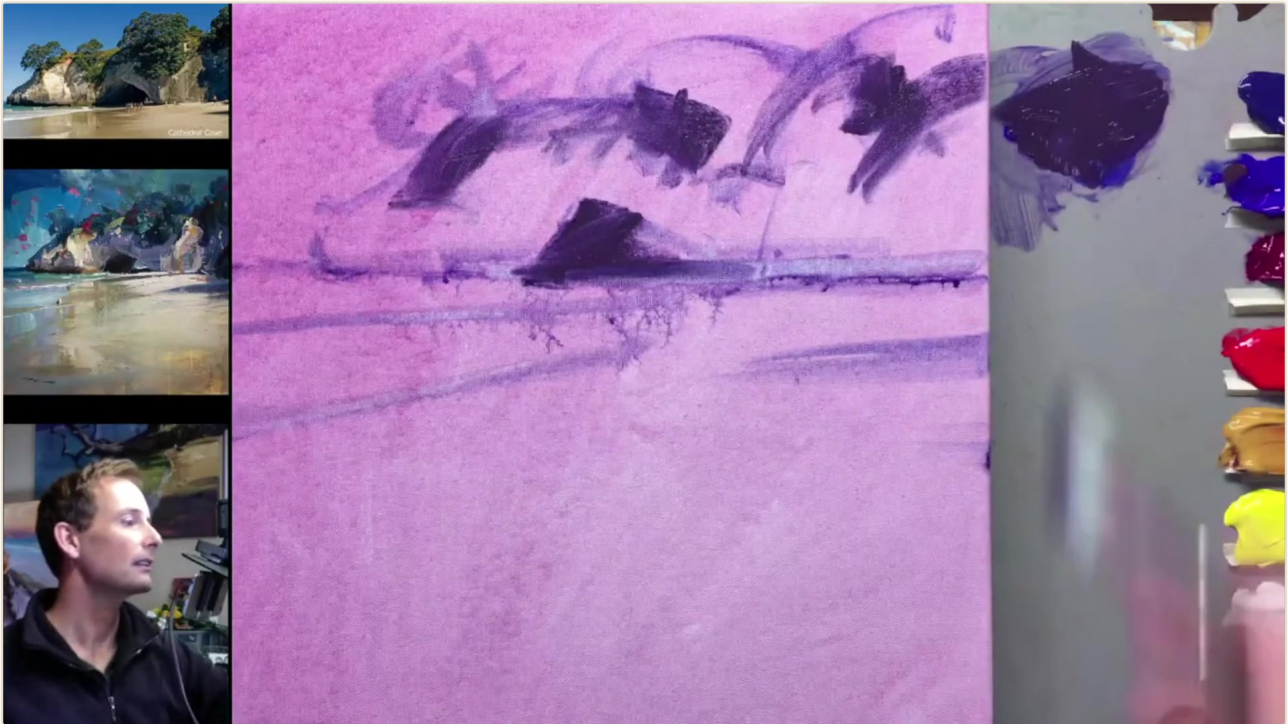
Block in the Darks

Apply the mixed dark color thinly to the canvas. Focus on covering the areas that require the deepest shadows to establish the painting's tonal foundation.

PRO TIP

Use a spray bottle with water to keep acrylic paints moist and workable.

5 Infused Light Technique



Prepare the Canvas

Use a big flat brush to apply a thin layer of paint to cover the canvas. The long bristles will hold a lot of paint, allowing you to cover the canvas quickly and efficiently.

Mix the Sky Color

Add more blue to your palette and mix in a little bit of white. Include a touch of Lez Surin to maintain the dark tones needed for the background.

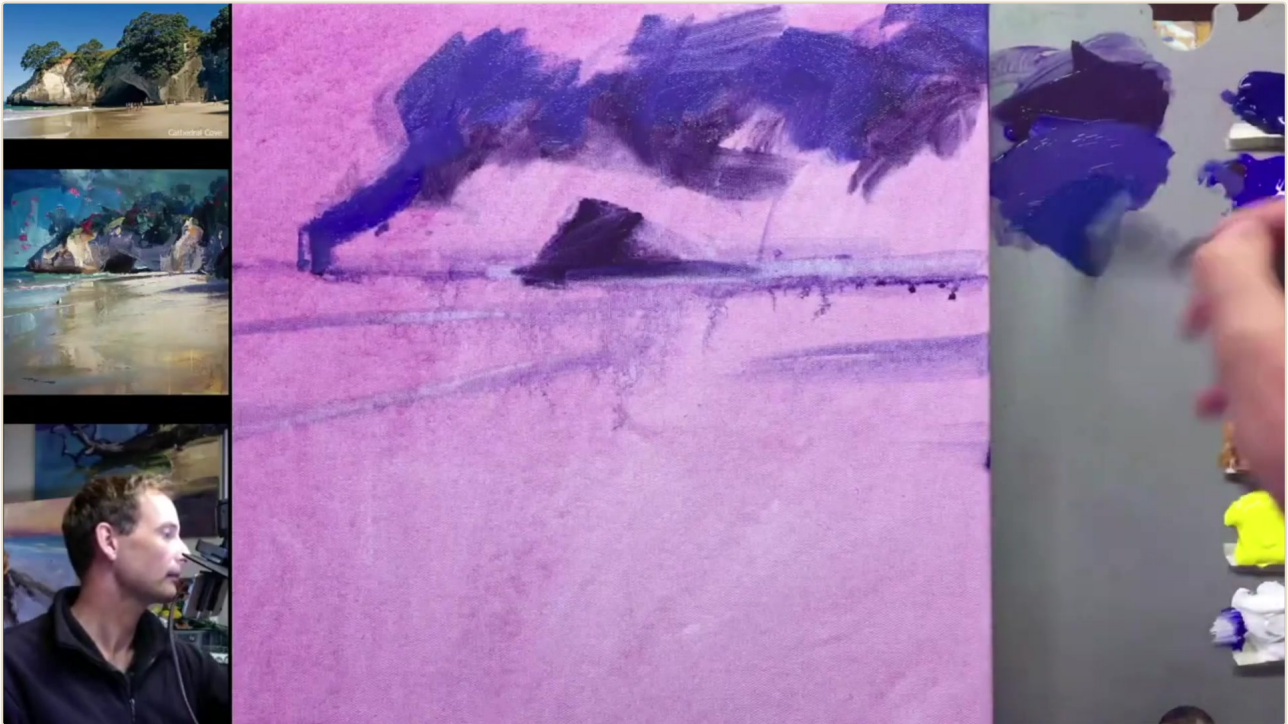
Apply the Infused Light Technique

Paint the background with the mixed sky color, extending beyond where the trees and other objects will be. This technique allows the blue light to infuse the edges of the objects, creating depth and a sense of light pushing past them.

PRO TIP

Use long-bristled brushes to hold more paint and cover larger areas efficiently.

6 Color Mixing and Avoiding Black



Mix a Mid-Value Color

Combine a small amount of phthalo blue, bright yellow, and white on your palette. Aim for a mid-value color by comparing it to a mid-gray on your palette. Squint at your mixture to ensure it matches the mid-value, which helps in achieving the right balance.

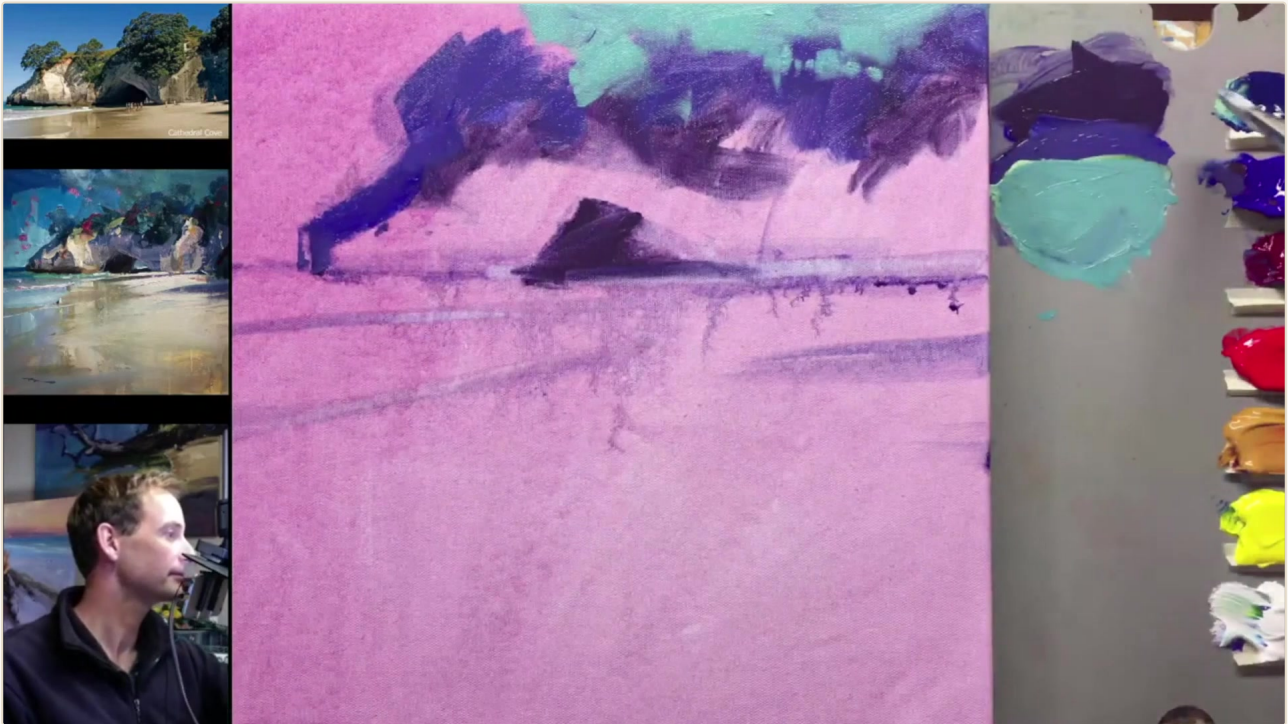
Avoid Using Black for Grays

Instead of using black to mix grays, use complementary colors. This approach results in more vibrant and colorful grays. Beginners should especially avoid black to prevent their paintings from looking dull and lifeless.

PRO TIP

Use complementary colors instead of black to mix more colorful grays.

7 Acrylics and Color Variation



Choose Your Acrylics

Use Atelier Interactive acrylics for their versatility and ease of use. Consider getting larger tubs if you're planning to work on big paintings.

Create Color Variation

Shift the color in your painting from green to blue to introduce variation. Focus on changing the hue rather than the value to add interest to large areas.

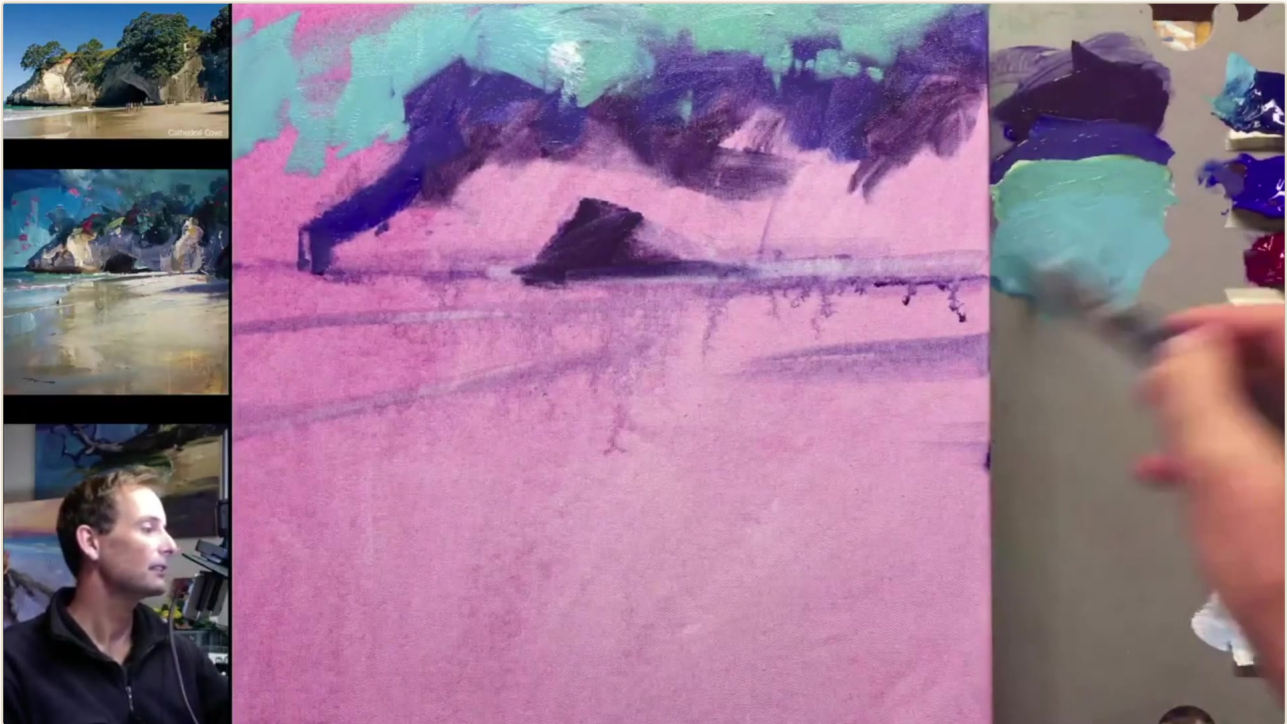
Practice Under Mixing

Avoid thoroughly mixing your colors on the canvas. Allow the paint to blend naturally to create unique, painterly effects that can't be achieved through traditional mixing.

PRO TIP

Use under mixing to achieve beautiful, painterly effects by allowing colors to blend naturally on the canvas.

8 Under Mixing and Texture



Paint the Dark Section

Use both blues to paint the dark section at the top. Avoid mixing the colors into a uniform soup to maintain texture and vibrancy.

Leave Canvas Showing

Allow some of the canvas to show through in a few spots. This creates a nice color vibration and adds interest to the painting.

Preserve the Pink

Make an effort to keep some of the pink areas visible. Resist the urge to paint over all of it to maintain its visual impact.

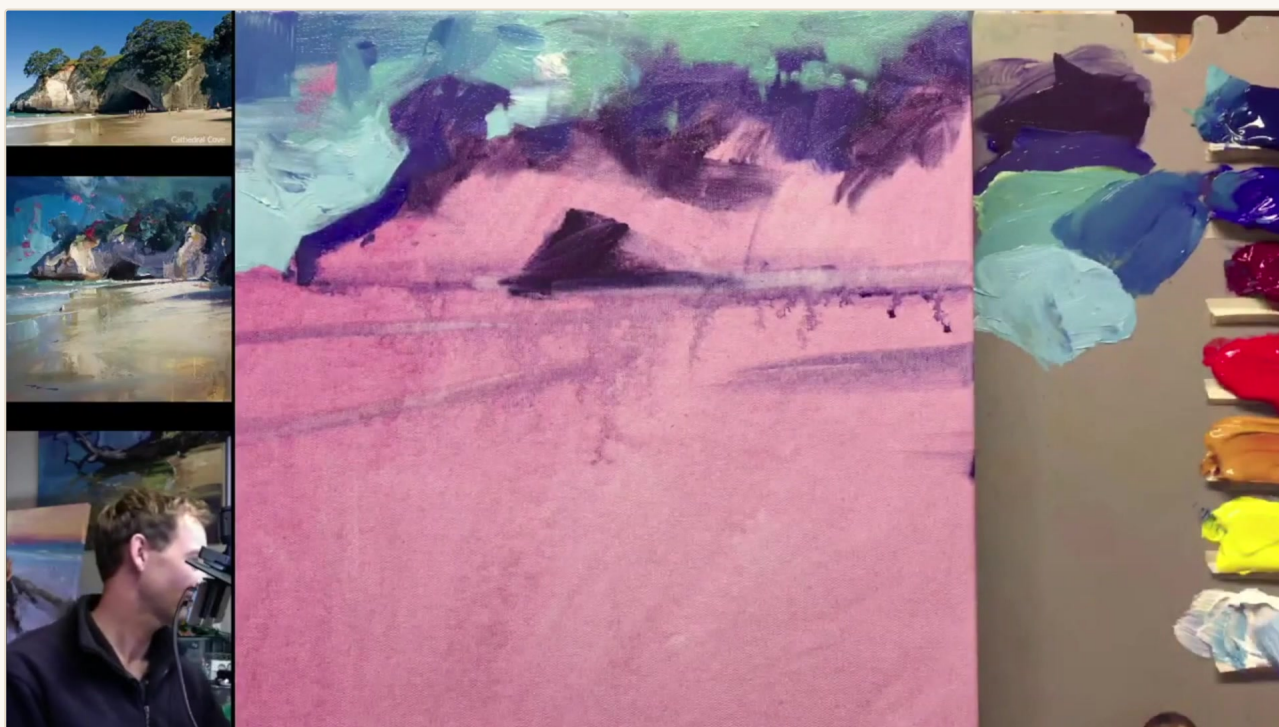
Avoid Overworking

Apply the paint with confidence and avoid overworking the areas. Beautiful paintwork often comes from placing the paint and leaving it without excessive fiddling.

PRO TIP

Allow some canvas to show through for color vibration and added interest.

9 Painting Process and Techniques



Create Cloud Textures

Use the side of the brush with a light touch to add clouds. Drag the brush to achieve a broken paint finish, or press harder for a smoother finish.

Switch Brushes for Clean Colors

Use a new brush when transitioning between major color changes, such as from blues to greens. This prevents muddy colors and keeps your palette clean.

Mix and Apply Green Tones

Mix phthalo, yellow ochre, bright yellow, and a little white to create the right value for greens. Start with the darkest version and build up to highlights, following a dark-to-light process.

Add Texture with Brush Techniques

Press and drag the brush to create interesting textures. Allow some paint to remain unmixed for variety. Experiment with different brushes and tools to add abstract elements.

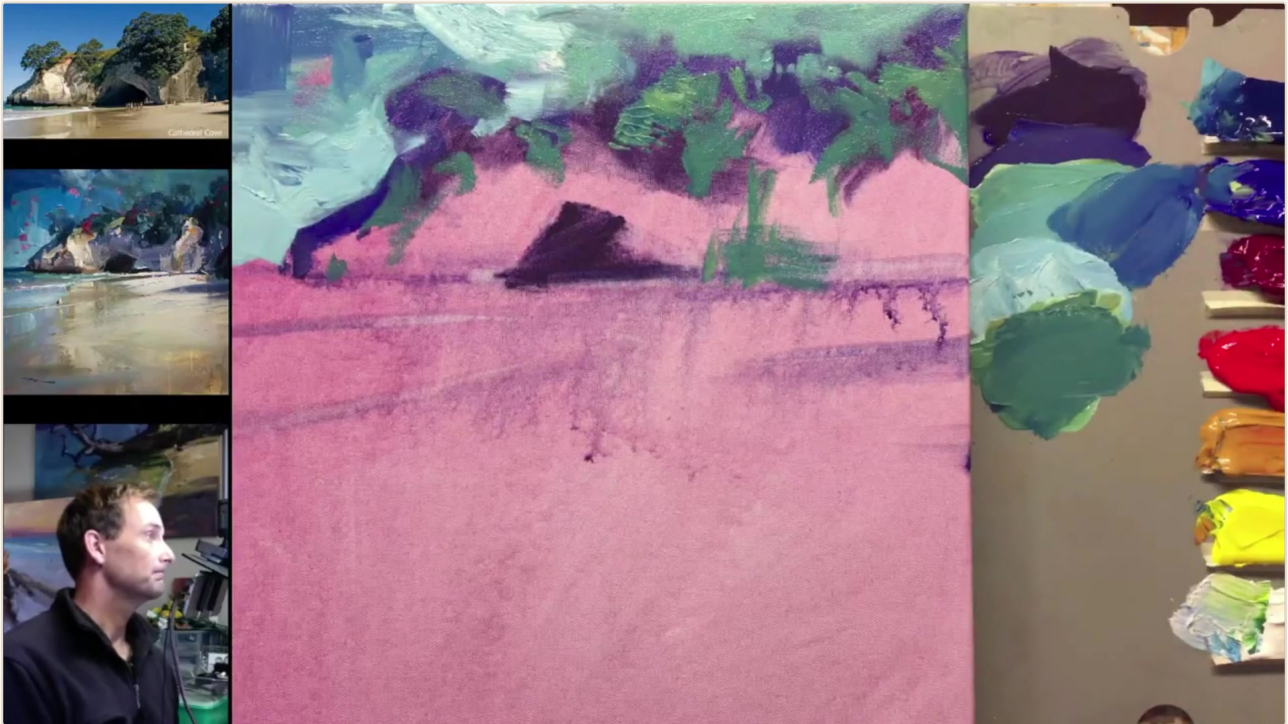
Maintain a Wet Palette

Spray the palette and painting surface to keep the acrylics wet. This prevents the paint from skinning over and allows for wet-on-wet techniques.

PRO TIP

Use a new brush when changing major color areas to keep colors clean and vibrant.

10 Adding Shadows and Light Balance



Mix Dark Shadow Color

Combine ultramarine blue, alizarin, and white to create a dark shadow color for the rocks. This mixture will help define the shadows effectively.

Balance Light and Dark

Consider the balance of light and dark in your painting. Use areas of gray to create contrast and allow the colorful center of interest to stand out.

Add Warmth to Shadows

Spray the canvas lightly to keep the paint workable. Add a touch of yellow ochre, white, and red to the shadow mixture to warm it up. Apply this warmer tone to the designated shadow areas.

PRO TIP

Use gray areas to balance and enhance the vibrancy of your painting's focal point.

11 Color Variations in Rocks



Add Color Variations

Mix a little yellow ochre with a touch of red to create a warm hue. Apply this mixture to the rock areas to introduce subtle color variations. These variations mimic the natural oranges found in rocks, possibly due to iron content.

PRO TIP

Use yellow ochre and red to create natural-looking color variations in rocks.

12 Painting Lights and Impasto



Prepare Your Brush

Clean your brush thoroughly to avoid mixing unwanted colors. Use the same brush if you're not switching to a drastically different color.

Mix the Light Color

Create a warm light color using yellow ochre, bright yellow, and white. To gray it down slightly, add a touch of blue and perhaps a bit of alizarin.

Apply the Light Color

While the canvas is still wet, apply the light color to achieve juicy, painterly effects. Be careful of picking up dark paint on your brush, which can dull the light color.

Maintain Clean Brushwork

Regularly clean your brush to remove any dark paint gunk. Reload with fresh light color to maintain brightness and clarity.

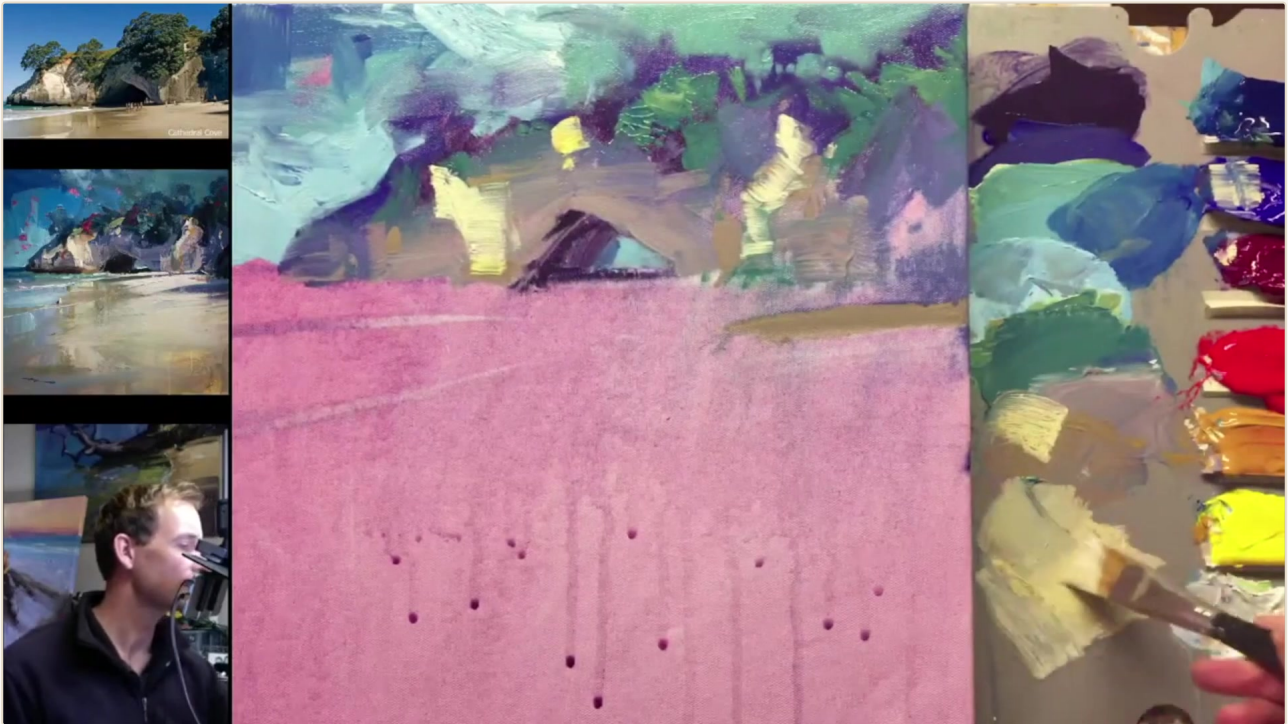
Add Impasto Texture

Apply the paint thickly to create an impasto effect, adding dimension and a sculptural quality to your painting. Avoid using too much water or medium to keep the paint thick.

PRO TIP

Regularly clean your brush to prevent dark paint from dulling your light colors.

13 Workshop Memories



Mix a Half Light

Combine the shadowy color with a lighter tone to create a half light. Use this mixture for the planes of the rocks that aren't directly in the sun. Adjust the mixture if it appears too light.

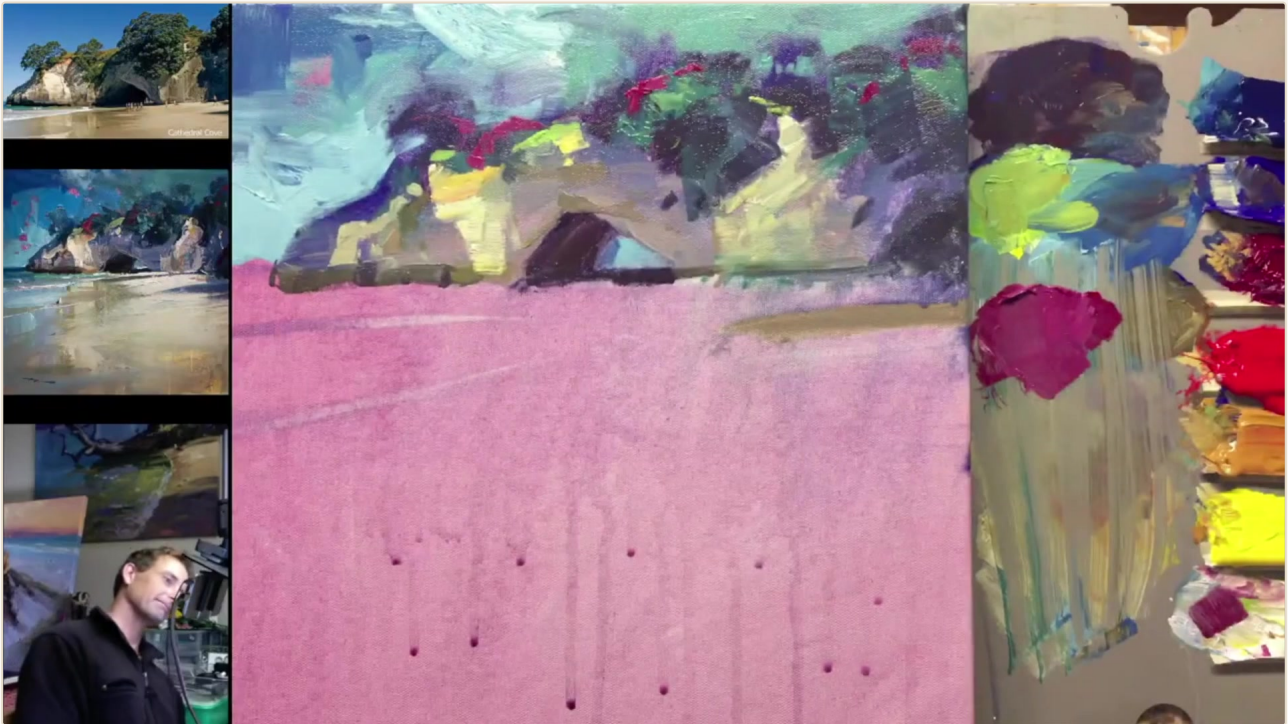
Consider Edge Sharpness

Use sharp edges to define the form of rocks in your painting. For softer subjects like clouds or trees, apply softer edges. Pay attention to the edges as you work on different objects to convey their form effectively.

PRO TIP

Use sharp edges to emphasize the form of rocks, while softer edges suit clouds and trees.

14 Painting the Ocean



Adjust the Ocean's Position

Lower the ocean line slightly if it appears too high. This adjustment will help maintain the composition's balance.

Create Soft Edges

Focus on making a soft edge at the horizon line. This contrasts with the existing hard edges and adds depth to the painting.

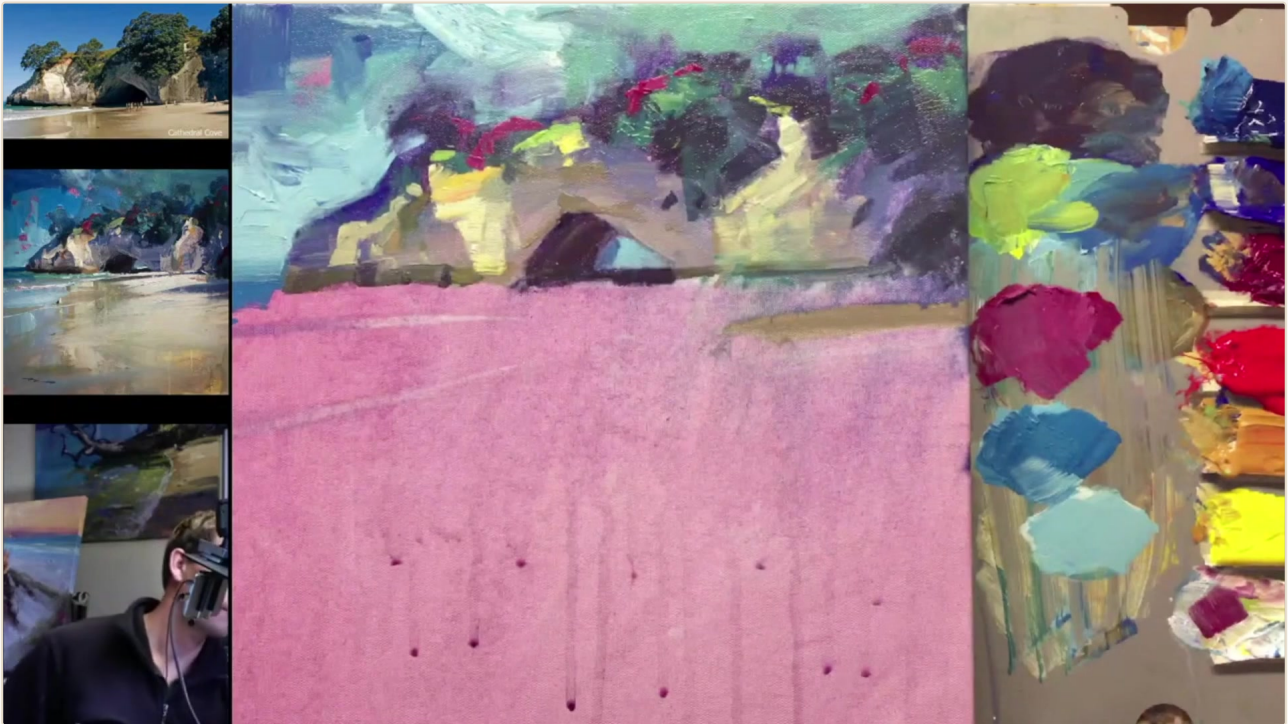
Keep Acrylics Wet

Spray the acrylics lightly with water every few minutes. This keeps the paint wet and allows you to manipulate edges more easily.

PRO TIP

Spray acrylics with water regularly to keep them workable and maintain soft edges.

15 Creating Waves and Texture



Mix Turquoise Water

Combine phthalo blue, bright yellow, and white to create a vibrant turquoise color. These colors are close on the color wheel, resulting in a punchy and beautiful turquoise for the water.

Maintain Clean Color Piles

Keep your color piles clean by avoiding dipping back and forth into mixed colors. This prevents all colors from blending into the same shade and maintains vibrancy.

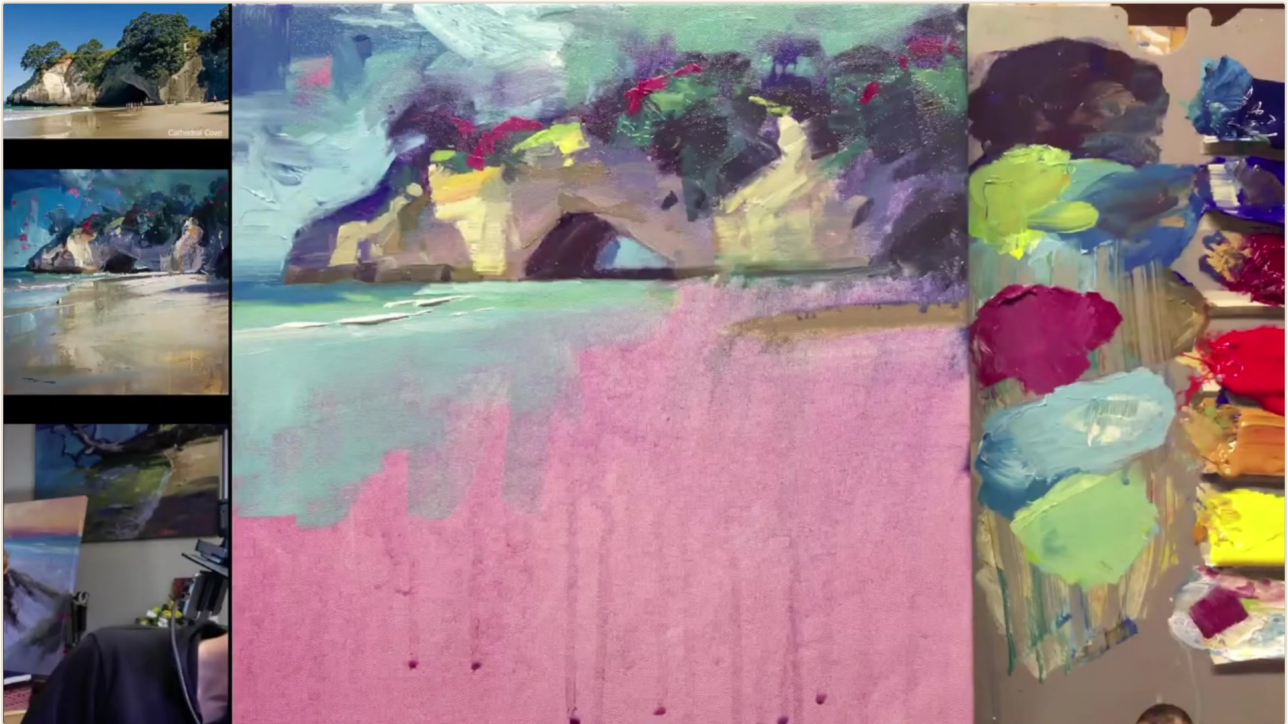
Add Waves with Impasto Technique

While the paint is still wet, use white paint to create waves with an impasto technique. This will cast its own shadow, adding a 3D effect to the waves.

PRO TIP

Use impasto technique with white paint to create waves that have a natural 3D effect.

16 Adding Reflections



Prepare the Brush

Select a large brush suitable for covering broad areas. This will help you apply the paint smoothly and efficiently.

Mix and Apply Base Color

Mix yellow ochre with white and a touch of red to create a warm, sandy hue. Apply this mixture carefully to the bottom area of your painting, ensuring even coverage.

Work from Light to Dark

Focus on the lighter section at the top and gradually work down into the darker areas. This approach will help you achieve a natural transition and depth in your painting.

Add Reflections

Use the same brush to add reflections, enhancing the appearance of wet sand. This will give your painting a more realistic and cohesive look.

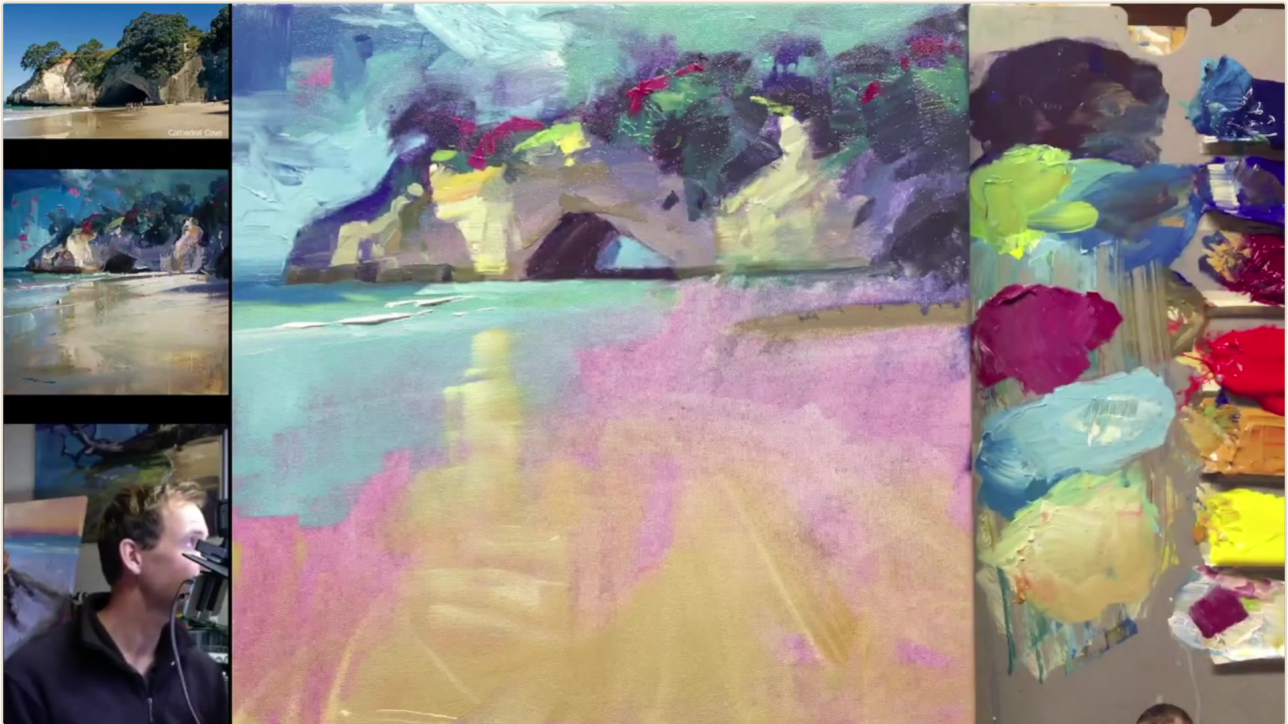
Blend with a Dry Brush

Take a dry brush and gently whisk it over the painted area. This technique softens the edges and blends the colors, creating a smooth, reflective surface.

PRO TIP

Use a dry brush to gently blend and soften the painted reflections, enhancing the wet sand effect.

17 Final Touches and Texture Techniques



Prepare Dark Areas

Mix a combination of blue, red, and a little white to create the dark areas. Apply these darks first to paint around them effectively.

Create Subtle Gradations

Mix a color that is in between your current tone and the brightest highlight. Add a touch of blue to tone down the orange, creating a subtle gradation up to the strongest light.

Use Excess Paint Wisely

If you accidentally mix too much paint, remember that it's okay. You can use the excess paint on other parts of the canvas or for future projects.

Add Texture with a Palette Knife

Use a palette knife to create interesting textural effects on the canvas. This adds depth and interest to the painting.

Experiment with Flicking Paint

Add more water to your paint and flick it onto the canvas for a random textural effect. This can make the painting more dynamic and engaging.

Refine with White Highlights

Add a little more white to your mix and drag it off to the side of the brush. Use a test stroke to ensure the right amount before applying it to the canvas for fine lines.

Balance Gestural and Detailed Work

Be gestural in less critical areas, but slow down and focus on detail where it matters. This balance will help the painting come together as a semi-abstract, semi-realistic piece.

PRO TIP

Use a palette knife to add texture and depth to your painting, enhancing its visual interest.

Summary & Key Takeaways

Embark on your painting journey by embracing gestural strokes and expressive brushwork. Begin with a magenta wash to set a vibrant undertone, then sketch the composition with an eye for the scene's big shapes and natural curves. As you block in the darks, remember to keep your acrylics moist and workable, establishing a strong tonal foundation for your piece.

As you progress, explore the infusion of light and color variations. Use complementary colors to mix vibrant grays and allow natural blending on the canvas for painterly effects. Maintain texture and vibrancy by letting some canvas show through and using a variety of brushes and techniques to add depth and interest.

In the final stages, focus on adding shadows, light balance, and reflections to bring your painting to life. Use impasto techniques to create dynamic waves and reflections, and employ a palette knife for intriguing textures. Balance gestural strokes with detailed work to achieve a harmonious blend of abstraction and realism.

LESSON POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Upsize brushes and paint quantity on larger canvases to maintain expressiveness.
- Use a thin magenta wash as an undertone to enhance blues and greens.
- Ensure the line at the base of the rocks has a slight curve to depict the beach's slope.
- Use complementary colors instead of black to mix more colorful grays.
- Allow some canvas to show through for color vibration and added interest.
- Use a new brush when changing major color areas to keep colors clean and vibrant.
- Spray acrylics with water regularly to keep them workable and maintain soft edges.
- Use a palette knife to add texture and depth to your painting, enhancing its visual interest.



Cathedral Cove 15x15" Acrylic on Canvas

Student Critiques

Club members painted their own versions of this scene and I critiqued each one. Their paintings — and my feedback — are a wonderful way to see this lesson's ideas in action.

“Cathedral Cove, 11x14, oil on canvas panel” by Reenie McCallum



Cathedral Cove, 11x14, oil on canvas panel

Hey Reenie, this is beautiful! LOVE the strong sense of warm sunlight you've created with all that bounced light into the shadows of the cliff. Dreamy! Ooh the little detail of the cliff seen through the archway is tantalising! Great subtle colour work in the water showing the banding at different depths and also the reflections of the cliff and figures. Nice. Can't think of anything that would improve on your great work except to see your signature on it and hung in a nice frame. Congratulations!

"Cathedral Cove. Oil on canvas board, 12" x 12"" by Antonia Clark



Cathedral Cove. Oil on canvas board, 12" x 12"

Antonia, great effort - pushing yourself to make gestural marks and impasto effects when you're clearly clearly a quite controlled painter. You've made some repetitive patterns within your gestural marks, and when you do that it detracts from the feeling of freedom that is generally the intentional of such marks. Making patterns can be a difficult habit to break, but it's worth the struggle. Before each stroke, think about how you might make it different from your previous stroke. Think of all the aspects of a mark you can change, like thickness, speed, size, pressure and shape, and then make a decision to change. Also try switching your painting hand or grip ever so often. Enjoy!

“Wish you were here” by **Lindsay Shaw**



Wish you were here

Hi Lindsay, first of all, I love the chunky feel of your varied brushwork in the cliff - just gorgeous. Good to see you exploring the impasto texture in the foreground, although it's a shame that degree of freedom didn't spill out into the treatment in the water as well - got a little tight there, also in the sky which could benefit from a few larger more gestural strokes. You're walking the line between tight and loose in this painting and with a little more courage could break through into a really exciting gestural piece. Really very nice. I encourage you to keep pushing.

“Cathedral Cove-semi abstract version” by Barbara Magor



Cathedral Cove-semi abstract version

This one's gone even more abstract and textural - interesting! The drawing of the base of the cliff has gone a bit wonky. Was that intentional? Remember that going more gestural and abstract doesn't mean you have to lose control of the drawing. It's hard to maintain, but in my opinion well worth the extra effort to create a painting that's strong on both abstract aesthetics and technical drawing skill. You've sure got some beautiful textures working there. Great to see.